

quite hard and earnestly, to improve his lot
 for him
 Such people even went so far as to welcome
 the presence
 of workmen in the House of Commons It was
 another
 matter when they were asked to consider the
 notion of
organised workmen, forming associations,
 whether industrial
 or political, to improve their own lot possibly
 even alter
 the general arrangement of lots On this issue
 the real
 controversy turned, it was to the education of
 minds on
 this crucial point that the Webbs made a
 contribution
 that has coloured the general outlook, and the
 outlook of
 statesmen, with positively transforming effect
 They began
 this education with the very first sentence of
 their History

"A Trade Union, as we understand the term, is a
 continuous
 association of wage-earners for the purpose of
 maintaining or
 improving the conditions of their working lives
 This form of
 association, has, as we shall see, existed in England
 for over two
 centuries, and cannot be supposed to have sprung
 at once fully-
 developed into existence "

Very skilfully do they play here, upon the
 tendency of
 the English mind to think that anything that
 has, in fact,
 existed for a long time must be quite all right
 Of course
 they reject the false analogy, later sought to be
 established,
 between the Medieval Gild and the self-
 governing associa-
 tion of workers at the same time, they
 point out that,
 so long as industry was earned on mainly by
 small masters,
 the "industrious apprentice" might
 reasonably hope, if
 not to marry his master's daughter, at any
 rate to set up

in business for himself So, while

"industrial oppression belongs to all ages, it is not until the changing conditions of industry had reduced to an infinitesimal chance the journeyman's prospect of becoming himself a master, that we find the passage of ephemeral combinations into permanent trade societies "

Through a detailed survey, based on contemporary documentation, of the flounshmg associations that did exist